

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 10, 2022

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Fran McCaffery

Jordan Bohannon

Keegan Murray

Postgame Press Conference



BIG

MEN'S BASKETBALL
TOURNAMENT
INDIANAPOLIS 2022

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Iowa - 112, Northwestern - 76.

MODERATOR: We are joined by Iowa Head Coach Fran McCaffery, along with Keegan Murray and Jordan Bohannon.

Coach McCaffery will start with an opening statement, and then we'll take questions for the students.

So Coach, go ahead.

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, we can't play much better than we played tonight, obviously. Everything was clicking, our offense was really good. I thought early on, our rebounding, especially on the offensive glass, I think was crucial. I think coming into the game, we recognized that when we played Northwestern 10 days ago, they were not right. They had a number of guys with the flu, so you kind of throw that game out. Watched a ton of their games. I have so much respect for Chris and his program, and really watched them play extremely well against so many teams. A substantial number of wins.

So we felt like we needed to play with the kind of effort we played with tonight in order to win. And I think the way we started the second half and continued, that speaks to these two guys here and everybody else. A lot of great play from a lot of different people. Hopefully, that will continue.

Q. Jordan, curious if you remember the previous, your previous game here in this building against Oregon last year. How motivated, I guess, were you to kind of create some new memories here?

JORDAN BOHANNON: Yeah, I was definitely looking forward to getting back here and playing. Obviously, it

wasn't a great ending last time we were in this arena. We played a really hot team with Oregon and we were just -- you know, myself, I played one of the worst games of my career, so that was really tough to stomach this entire offseason. We had a really good team last year, and I think that provided an edge for not only myself, but the entire team to really work hard this offseason. I understand that we have a really great team coming back this year, whether a lot of people believed that or not. We believed that in the locker room and we continue to believe that to this day.

Q. Keegan, you guys continue to get off to really good starts. What do you attribute that to?

KEEGAN MURRAY: Yeah, I just think early on I feel like we're moving the ball really well, especially at the start of games and that's kind of fed into different guys getting easy looks and we're getting the stops we needed. The last couple games, I feel like in the first half we've been getting on runs, our defense has been really good. It's just attribute to our connection on the court. I think that's something that we need to keep doing.

Q. When you're having a game like that, where it's not just you but everybody on the team is just hitting everything, what is that like and, I don't know, were you guys in the zone, so to speak? What's it like for you in that moment?

KEEGAN MURRAY: Yeah, I think it's kind of -- we have that a couple of times this season. It's obviously a good feeling, especially in a gym where we really, we had a 25-minute warm up, we didn't have a shoot around. So it's kind of crazy to see that for our first game in this building. So it's obviously good to see a lot of our young guys and a lot of our guys off the bench come in, hit shots, make an impact on that end. So it was good to see, for sure.

JORDAN BOHANNON: It just builds a lot of team morale, the fact that we're able to get a lot of these guys in that haven't had a lot of playing time throughout the season. The walk-ons come in, they're able to get a chance to play in front of their families and be a part of this Big Ten Conference Tournament experience. It kind of builds the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

team morale, like I said, and it continues to help our team going forward, especially when you're trying to make it run at the end of the season.

Q. Jordan, you mentioned -- you said "whether people believe it or not." I imagine you're familiar with the narrative about the program and March success and things like that. From your point of view, why is this group different in terms of being able to, you know, make a run this March?

JORDAN BOHANNON: I wouldn't take anything aside from last year. I think we had a really fantastic team. We just ran into the wrong team at the wrong time. I don't want to take away from anything that we did last year, because we battled through COVID and had one of the top teams in the country still. From that aspect, I don't want to take anything away from last season. But this season, I think we kept that same mentality and that edge that we had last year. We were kind of playing with the underdog mentality, I guess that's a little different from last year. But we have a lot of guys this year that can really -- Keegan's going continue to do 20-10 every game no matter what. And we have a lot of guys all step up, whether it's his brother. Connor's coming in and playing really well right now. Patrick's playing well now and he's back in the lineup and healthy again. And I'm going to continue to try to lead the team on the floor as a point guard. We just have a lot of pieces that are flowing together and we're going to continue to try to stay together the rest of the season.

Q. Keegan, you guys are playing Rutgers tomorrow, a team that held you guys to the lowest scoring output of the season as a team and held you to the lowest of the season. I'm wondering when the bracket comes out, you see the next opponent on the docket, are you excited to get another crack at them and take that taste out of your mouth and get another crack at them?

KEEGAN MURRAY: Yeah, I think it's a team we only played once this year and we all felt it's a game should have won at their place. I feel like for us we wanted this game and we got it now, so it's just putting the pieces together going over the scout and trying to get the win against a physical team and obviously held us to our lowest scoring output of the season but I feel like if we play at our pace it will be at a good game.

Q. Jordan, where is Tony Perkins now compared to a month ago, say?

JORDAN BOHANNON: I think he's made extraordinary strides. What you're seeing now is a lot more confident Tony. He's able to do a lot off the dribble of being confident with, not only scoring for himself, but he's doing a really

great job of finding other people. If you just look at his assist numbers the last couple of games, he's been phenomenal, creating open shots for other people, and I think that's why he's taken his game to the next level.

He's always been kind of that scorer, but now he's realizing he can use that to his advantage and really open up other people's games and he's going to continue to get better. He's technically a freshman. You know, all these sophomores now, they haven't played in front of arenas and they finally have this under their belt. So he's still a really young kid, but he's understanding the game of basketball and he's got a bright future ahead of him.

Q. Keegan, do you feel that this is maybe the most confidence you've been playing with or most the zone in your career? This run of hot form you've been on lately, how would you stack that up?

KEEGAN MURRAY: For me it's just not getting in foul trouble, first of all. That was kind of a struggle for me early on in the Big Ten season and just staying on the floor as much as I can. I feel like I'm getting my spots at the right times and every time I step on the court I feel like I'm the best player on the court, so that's just kind of the mindset going into every game. I've been playing pretty well these last couple months and so has our team. It's just kind of attribute to them as well.

JORDAN BOHANNON: And he's starting to smile a little more, so that's going to help out.

Q. Coach, mid-season rebounding was considered a problem or an issue with the Hawkeyes and today you outrebound Northwestern 45-18 and I think it was something none of us saw coming, it was one of those things that improved gradually throughout the year. What do you point to as the reason for that?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I think it's simply just recognition that we had to be better. We had a team that was capable of rebounding well, you have both Murrays, you have Filip Rebraca, you have Connor. We have big wings, we've got length, and the other thing is we've got guards who rebound. We talked about Tony a minute ago and he's really one of the better rebounding guards I think I've ever coached. I think it's just the mindset that we recognized had to improve and it has.

Q. Coach, following up what Jordan said a second ago about Tony, this is back-to-back games where he set a career high in assists. How have you seen that aspect of his game develop as at the end of the year?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: He always did this, you

guys didn't see him in high school, but he was a guy that could play either guard position in high school. We noticed that about him last year. We had more competition back there with Wieskamp especially, so Tony was going to get his shot.

Tonight, Joe T and A-U getting in foul trouble right away, and we just had Tony out there with the one, and we just kind of move him around. We could play the three, we can switch and he's a tough dude. But he could always handle the ball and pass the ball and make plays for other people. I think that's what makes him special. That's why he was such a great high school player and we felt so strongly about having him join our program and be an impact player in the Big Ten.

Q. Tournament record for points in a game, threes, how impressed are you with their offensive performance and what do you think added to it today?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: I think the thing that's impressive is we had a lot of different guys making them, it wasn't one or two guys and that's, obviously, what you want as a coach. Tomorrow's game will be a lot different in terms of style of play, so we'll enjoy and appreciate this performance and put it behind us.

Q. Patrick, back in the starting lineup today, what did you see from him? Seemed like he was very aggressive to start, especially on offense.

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I thought he was really good. He ran out of gas a little bit, said he felt good, but he seemed to be a little fatigued. I would have put him back in, but not when we were up by 30 points, so we kept him out.

I thought, like you said, he moved without the ball, he was aggressive attacking, his defense was pretty solid, he had one breakdown and that's when he got tired and I was trying to get him out. I just have to make sure that he's going good physically. He had been sick, as you know, hadn't practiced and hadn't really done anything. We didn't know what was going to happen today. So all in all, we're very pleased with him.

Q. Jordan's talking about this group has an edge and an underdog mentality and all that stuff. You've had, what, 11 teams at Iowa come into the postseason. Is there anything discernibly different about the mental makeup of this group?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: No, I don't think so. I never really look at that kind of stuff, to be honest with you. It's not something I discuss, it's not something I try to evaluate

or identify or encourage.

I have an expectation, you sign up to play in the Big Ten, you believe in yourself. I obviously believe in you, I gave you a scholarship. So you believe in yourself and you recognize how hard it is in this league, so you just bring it every day and compete to the best of your ability.

I felt like we had a team that was deep, I thought we had a lot of different weapons, I thought we had -- we've got length, we've got depth, we had enough shooting, we had enough veteran leadership. We have some young guys that are going to have to step up. The one challenge, as I said at media day, where everyone on the team was going to be in a new role.

So that's always a challenge, but it's also exciting and I think those guys have just kind of stayed the course and believed in themselves and continued to get better. I think as a coach that's what you hope to have, a team that stays together and keeps grinding, that's what we've done.

Q. You know what happened at Rutgers, obviously it looked like a very different team than you had for most of the season and especially last month. Do you sense the guys in the locker room are champing at the bit to get another crack at Rutgers? Or even you, are you excited to get another shot at Rutgers tomorrow?

COACH FRAN McCAFFERY: To be honest with you, I really don't look at it that way. You show up in this tournament, whoever you play against, you'd better be ready. Anybody you show up to play against can beat you. We feel like anybody we show up to play against, we can beat them. So we're just trying to lock in to a game plan and play well and stay together.

All that, "Boy, I hope we have another shot," all that nonsense, you just get on to the next game. This could have been any number of teams that we're playing tomorrow.

I will say this, I have a tremendous amount of respect for that program and the job that Steve has done. That group, you know, Harper, Geo, McConnell, Mulcahy. I think Cliff's one of the most underrated players in the country, probably one of the most improved players in the country. So they've got a really good team. That's enough for us. We know what we're facing tomorrow.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach. Congratulations, see you tomorrow.